

CHIEF'S SIGHT PICTURE:
Our Nation Needs Us Now More than Ever

As Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and NOBLE EAGLE continue to evolve we are learning more about their impact on our AEF rotation patterns. We have all heard the President and Secretary of Defense speak. This will be a long struggle and our expeditionary Air Force must adjust to its pace and rhythm.

Already, in two short months, the war on terrorism and protecting our homeland from further attack have put significant strains on our air and space forces as well as our Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve. You have responded magnificently to unprecedented events—our nation is proud of its Air Force. We still have much to do and it's important that I explain what we've done over the last two months and what you can expect in the future.

On September 11th, our Air Force—our total force—was among the first to respond, launching interceptors and tankers from alert across the United States. Within hours we provided disaster assistance and began flying homeland defense missions that have continued around the clock since then—fighter, tanker, AWACS, and Air Control Squadrons all across America stood up overnight to prevent another airborne attack. Our security forces also responded magnificently when, for the first time ever, all our installations went to FPCON Charlie/Delta. We mobilized the ARC in large numbers and they have met every challenge at home and abroad.

Once it became clear we needed to send air and space capability forward, we responded with forces from the on-call AEW supplemented with residual capability from AEFs 7/8. In addition, our global reach structure responded and established the airbridge enabling our forces to deploy expeditiously. The requirements continued to grow and we soon exceeded the capability resident in the on-call AEW and AEF pair. Staying within the AEF construct, we rolled forward to the next AEF pair, which was in the spin-up process for their upcoming on-call period.

Unlike past experience, much of the deployment strain has fallen on our expeditionary combat support forces. Some high-demand support areas have exceeded their on-call capabilities in AEFs 7/8 and 9/10 and we have rolled forward into later AEFs. We are in surge mode—and will likely stay there for some time.

Many have asked when we will rotate forces supporting Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). We are studying all the options and anticipate making a decision before the end of the calendar year. We do not foresee the capability to rotate OEF forces at the three-month point—we expect to provide relief some time in the February-March timeframe.

It is important for everyone in the Air Force to realize the mission has changed and they may have to spend more than the usual 3 months in the field. Also, in a few cases, we have insufficient capability to relieve currently deployed forces—a very small number of individuals (currently about a dozen) will be frozen in place until we can identify their replacements—we are working hard to reduce that number to zero so everyone can rotate. My objective is to keep the AEF construct intact as long as possible to maximize stability for our total force.

Looking to the future, in the near-term I expect we will experience significant impacts to our training, organization, and resources. I have tasked the Air Staff and our Major Commands to analyze the short- and long-term impacts of this war on our Air Force and our people. We will adjust our rotational patterns to meet the challenges we face and remain combat capable.

Our nation is at war with terrorism—there is no more “business as usual.” The AEF essentials of predictability, stability, rhythm, and capability will remain intact to the maximum extent practical, but we must do whatever it takes to continue meeting our war fighting and homeland defense commitments. The eyes of all Americans are on us as we stand tall against terrorism—we must, **and will**, meet every challenge!